

The Four First Principles

(A summary of sections of the book *Metaphysics* by Dr. Dennis McInerny)

Every science is founded upon principles. The definition of a science is, "*an organized body of knowledge, based on and guided by first principles, that seeks understanding in terms of causes.*" Every science, therefore, should be an organized body of knowledge that is founded on some principles, and it should understand by examining the causes of things. For example, physics is the study of things as they exist in motion. So the science of physics has an organized body of knowledge (the laws and equations that govern motion), based on and guided by first principles (in physics, there are the laws of motion: for example, the principle that a body in motion tends to stay in motion unless acted on by an external force – Newton's first law of motion), and this science seeks understanding in terms of causes (it explains and predicts motion by evaluating the effect of the causes of motion). Understanding what a science is, we should be able to see that philosophy and theology are actually sciences themselves and in fact they are the highest sciences. The science of studying existence itself, from which philosophy comes, is based on **four first principles**.

The first of these principles is called the principle of identity, and it is stated as follows: *A thing is what it is, and is not something else.* This is the principle that affirms that every being is identifiable as a thing, distinguishable from other things. This principle says that each thing has a determinate nature. A thing is what it is, and is not something else. A dog is a dog, and is not a cat. A rock is a rock and is not a plant. The principle of identity, that a thing actually is what it is, and is not something else, is a judgment, a statement that a thing exists in a certain way and not in another.

The next principle is the principle of non-contradiction. This principle states that: *It is impossible for something both to be and not be at the same time and in the same respect.* This principle is a statement about the fact that it is impossible to both affirm and deny one particular thing about an object, or better put, that it is impossible to both affirm and deny the very same thing about an object. Things exist in a way that would preclude at a given time and in a given way the opposite way of existing. For example, it is not possible to be both in Nebraska and in Idaho at the same time and in the same respect. Yet in different respects, one can be in two places, such as when one might be physically in Nebraska and yet have one's mind and heart in Idaho, so to speak.

Is this principle denied by the world? To answer, consider how some people believe they can be close to God while they are ignoring His Commandments which unite us to Him. Or consider the occasionally stated idea that, "I'm not religious but I'm spiritual." Well, since the very word religion means the re-binding of a person to God, Who is the source of everything spiritu-

al, how can one be spiritual without being rebound to the source of the spiritual; that is, without being religious? How can one claim to both be spiritual and at the same time not be religious? One cannot both be and not be at the same time and in the same respect. Consider also the statement that, "personally I'm against abortion, but I support the right for someone to choose it." How can one say he is against abortion 'personally' when the same person supports the 'right' to abort a child?

The third principle is the principle of excluded middle and it can be stated this way: *Between being and non-being, there is no middle ground.* This principle proceeds from both the first and the second principles, which we have just described. A being either is or it is not. It either exists or it does not. There is no middle state between existing and non-existing. There is no state in a thing such as 'almost existing' or 'becoming'. Becoming is neither non-being nor being. For something to be 'becoming' there has to be 'that which becomes', in other words, a being. Nothing comes from nothing.

Is this principle also denied by the world? Consider the pseudo-science of evolution, which holds that between 'being' as one species and 'being' as another there must have been a middle ground of evolutionary transitional creatures, let alone the ontological evidence that this denies the principle of identity (an ape is an ape and is not a man) and that physical evidence that no transitional fossils exist.

The fourth principle is called the principle of sufficient reason. The principle can be stated this way: *Whatever exists has a sufficient reason for its existence.* This principle concerns the origin of being. Things must have an explanation for their existence – there has to be a sufficient cause for everything that exists. In other words, whatever enjoys real existence, must have an explanation for its existence. Is this principle denied by the world? The hypothesis of evolution is based on the ignoring of this principle, as well as on the denial of the principle of identity.

One only has to look to science's best explanations as to how the universe was formed to see that this principle is denied again. To attribute the development of sensible and intelligent creatures to mere chance and random evolution is to deny that a sufficient cause must have been in place for them to be brought into existence. Can anyone logically believe that complex organic organisms were simply the result of an explosion and whole lot of time? Explosions result in disorder and chaos, not order and beauty. According to the principle of sufficient reason, the existence of an entire universe filled with beauty and order means that there must exist a sufficiently great enough cause for the universe to be filled with this great extent of order and beauty.